

Breast Density

What is dense breast tissue?

Dense breast tissue refers to the appearance of breast tissue on a mammogram. Breasts are made up of milk glands and milk ducts (glandular tissue), fibrous and fatty tissue. When viewed on a mammogram, women with dense breasts have a lot of glandular or fibrous tissue and not much fat. Having dense breasts is common and is not abnormal.

Why is breast density important?

Dense breast tissue slightly increases your risk of getting breast cancer. It also makes it more difficult for doctors to see cancer on mammograms. This is because dense breast tissue looks white on a mammogram and breast masses or tumors also look white. Dense breast tissue can hide the masses or tumors.

How do I know if I have dense breasts?

You don't need to wonder anymore. North Dakota law now requires that women be notified if they have dense breasts. Breast density is determined by the radiologist who reads your mammogram.

What should I do if I am notified that I have dense breasts?

Most importantly, you should realize it is NOT abnormal and actually is quite common. You should also consider discussing with your healthcare provider any questions you may have. Together you can decide if any additional tests are right for you based on your overall risk for breast cancer and your personal preference. Tests may include 3D mammography, breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), breast ultrasound or breast specific gamma imaging. Some insurance plans may not cover these tests. Check with your health insurance company to see what is covered.

If I have dense breasts, should I still get a mammogram?

Yes, a mammogram is the best first step for breast cancer screening. Whether you have dense breasts or almost entirely fatty breasts, it is important to get regular mammograms. Talk to your healthcare provider about when you should start being tested and how often.

